



The Jugoslavs
in the United States

by

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THREE nationalities, the Serbs, the Croats and the Slovenes, have united to form the independent nation of Yugoslavia, and all of these nationalities are found in considerable numbers in the United States. Among the early Jesuit missionaries to the American Indians were Baron Rataj, a Croat, and Bishop Baraga, a Slovene. A few Croats from Dalmatia came to California during the gold rush of 1849, and Slovene homesteaders in small numbers settled in Minnesota soon after. But most of the Yugoslavs have come to this country since 1880 when the so-called "new immigration" began in response to the increased demand for unskilled labor to man our growing industries. There are now about 400,000 Yugoslavs scattered throughout the country, including 208,000 Slovenes, 140,000 Croats and 52,000 Serbs. Practically all of them were agriculturalists in the old country, but very few of them have gone out upon the land in America, although some of them have been very successful as fruit growers in California.

Their occupations

The great bulk of Yugoslav immigrants are engaged in manufacturing and mining, particularly in the metal and coal industries. They are located chiefly in the Pittsburgh district, in Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and Milwaukee; in the Minnesota Iron Range,

the coal basin of Kansas, the mining centers of Colorado and Wyoming and the copper fields of Arizona.

Explanation of popular ignorance about the Yugoslavs

The Yugoslavs are the least known of all of our Slavic group. One explanation for this lies in the fact that there are no large colonies of them in any of our cities, but they are scattered in polyglot communities and mingled with other Slavic peoples, and with Italians, Roumanians, Lithuanians and other national groups in such a way as to submerge the distinctive qualities of the people in the masses of foreign-speaking workers. Furthermore, the Yugoslavs are divided among themselves, each nationality having organizations and a national consciousness of its own, so that they have almost as much difficulty in presenting a united front in this country as they do in their new state where the Serbs and Croats are continually locking horns with each other in political controversy.

Organized activity of Yugoslavs in the United States

Like the other Slavic peoples, the Yugoslavs are highly organized in this country. There is scarcely any settlement of Yugoslavs which has not some kind of organized activity. Benevolent and fraternal societies are most wide-spread. The Slovenes have nine central organizations of this nature, the Croats seven and the Serbs four, and together they have over 3500 branch organizations with a membership of 200,000 and cash assets of \$7,000,000. No less than forty-six publications are printed in this country in one of the Yugoslav languages, and everywhere musical and athletic clubs, theatrical societies, and libraries are to be found through which the cultural life of the people is developed.

Divided religiously

Religiously, the Yugoslavs are also divided among themselves, the Slovenes and Croats being predominatingly Roman Catholic and the Serbs Eastern Orthodox. These divisions are perpetuated here. There are now 38 Slovene and 26 Croatian Roman Catholic parishes, 2 Croatian Greek Catholic and 23 Serbian Orthodox churches in the United States. The Roman Catholic Churches support 26 parochial schools, 14 for Slovenes and 12 for Croats. Furthermore, the Yugoslavs in the United States remain much more faithful to their old world faith than do many other immigrants. The Slovenes are almost as thoroughly devoted to the Roman Catholic faith as the Poles, and the Croats are scarcely less so, although the beginnings of a revolt against Rome are to be seen at the present time. The Serbs practically all retain a nominal allegiance to the Orthodox Church, but for the most of them religion has little meaning except on the great church holidays and other special occasions. As in Europe, many of the more intelligent and progressive leaders among the Yugoslavs have openly broken with the Church, but most of these have substituted either socialism or materialism for religion as the guiding principle of life.

Love of freedom and love of home marked characteristics

Interesting insight into the character and psychology of the Yugoslav immigrant may be gained by reading the autobiography of the most noted of their number, Professor M. I. Pupin, "From Immigrant to Inventor." The opening chapters describe with real charm the life of the little village in which the future Columbia professor was born and brought up. Two characteristics of every good Yugoslav are brought out very clearly, his love of freedom and his love of home. Professor Pupin graphically describes the

manner in which his youthful soul was stirred to patriotic devotion by the tales told by the village fathers of the glorious past of his people and also the manner in which he was able to give expression to this patriotism through anti-Austrian demonstrations. Nothing could be more touching than Professor Pupin's description of his humble home. His devotion to his mother remained his guide and stay even after he had become famous in the new world. The Yugoslavs have always been fighters; indeed, we have them to thank for protecting Europe from the invasion of the Turks. Unfortunately, they seem as ready to bicker among themselves as to fight against the common enemy. The Slavic trait of jealousy is one of the factors which has helped to make the Balkans the scene of continuous strife and warfare.

A real asset to our national life

In America, the Yugoslavs are proving themselves to be not only valuable industrial workers, with broad backs and willing hands, but good material for American citizenship. Enough Slovenes, Croats and Serbs have entered fully into American life and have made a large enough contribution to the common good, to convince us that the people as a whole will be a real asset to our national life, if they are but given an opportunity to come in touch with the best side of our American life and with distinctively Christian institutions and ideals.

Conditions under which they live unfavorable to their best development

As it is, too many of our Yugoslav immigrants live and work under conditions which cannot fail to give them an erroneous impression of America and a warped conception of the meaning of our ideals and institutions. The social and economic conditions in our mining and industrial towns do not provide the proper setting for an American

Christian home. The Jugoslavs and others who must endure such conditions may be able to earn a good living, but certainly they know little of that abundant life which Jesus would give to every man as his inherent right. One who knows the Jugoslavs well both in this country and abroad makes the following list of their outstanding social and religious needs: "They need better housing facilities, more adult education along the lines of health and sanitation, instruction in English, a better acquaintance with the spirit and institutions of America, education concerning the use of intoxicants, and better standards of housekeeping. Above all, they need a Christian religion which shows its result in every day living, just as we all do."

Protestant church in America is doing little for the Jugoslavs

But the Protestant churches of America have as yet made little or no effort to interpret Christian America to the Jugoslavs. The Baptists have one small mission among the Slovenes, and another among the Serbs, and the Lutheran Church has four large congregations consisting of those who were Lutherans in Europe, but aside from these we cannot point to a single church or mission which ministers to these people in their own language. Our Presbyterian Church has no work among the Jugoslavs as such, although in a few places, as in the Mesaba Range Parish and at Howell Neighborhood House, Chicago, some Jugoslavs are being reached. These nationalities are among the most neglected of all of our immigrant groups as far as the ministry of our Protestant church is concerned. We have no leaders capable of conducting a Protestant work nor any Protestant periodicals or literature in any of the Yugoslav languages, we have scarcely any Protestant nucleus among those who come to us; and the immigrants after their arrival appear to be unusually tenacious of their old faith.

These considerations may explain our neglect and indifference, but they do not excuse it. The Protestant Church has a duty of meeting human needs in the name of Christ. These needs are particularly urgent in the case of the Yugoslav industrial workers. The Protestant Church is called to reinterpret Christianity in terms of daily life wherever and whenever that reinterpretation is rendered necessary because of the inadequacy of their present form of Christian faith and practice. Such reinterpretation is sorely needed among the Yugoslavs where we have bigotry and suspicion on the one hand, and materialism and atheism on the other. We may not be able to win large numbers of them immediately to membership in our Protestant churches, but we can and should make to them an adequate demonstration of the idealism, altruism, and self-sacrificing service which characterizes the Christian religion at its best in America; and we can and should play our part in seeing to it that the young generation growing up here appropriates enough of the spirit of true Christianity to be able to contribute towards making the America of tomorrow a Christian America.

Methods of approach

In the case of groups such as this, it would seem that the best method of approach for our Protestant churches is not that of establishing Slovene or Croatian churches or missions, but rather the extension of the program of our American churches having Yugoslavs in their neighborhood so as to include a ministry to their social and religious needs. Some Neighborhood Houses are so situated that they can minister to Yugoslavs. They should point the way to a country-wide ministry to these people. If every Presbyterian church should seek out those Yugoslavs who are living in its community and endeavor to reach the children for clubs, classes and Sunday-school, and the adults for classes in

English and civics, a very promising beginning could be made towards a nation-wide service to these people. Let us study these new neighbors of ours, but more than that, let us resolve that we shall begin to put the resources of our church into an endeavor to serve them, and to work with them in the building of a better and more Christian America.

Where Jugoslavs may be found

Members of this Slavic group are to be found in considerable numbers in the following cities: Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Gary, Indiana; Youngstown, Ohio; Milwaukee, San Francisco, Joliet, Illinois; Lorain, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pueblo, Colorado; Los Angeles.

May the Presbyterian Churches of those sections take notice!

*The border and the motif used in this leaflet were drawn by a
Czech artist*

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